

**And remind (others), for the reminder most certainly benefits the Believers
Surah Zhāriyāt, verse 55**

THE MAKTAB SYSTEM: AS OLD AS ISLAM

- *The article below is intended to highlight the importance of primary madresa education, a system that many in our society has just taken for granted.*

IMPORTANCE OF ISLAMIC EDUCATION

Since its inception, Islam has placed great emphasis on *ta'leem* and *tarbiyat* of children. *Ta'leem* means the imparting of Islamic education, and *Tarbiyah* is the Islamic method of rearing and nurturing children. Rasoolullah (sallallahu alayhi wasallam) is reported to have said: ***“The seeking of knowledge is compulsory upon every Muslim”*** According to a narration that appears in Shu'abul-Iemaan of Imam Bayhaqi, the first words that our children should utter are the Kalimah '*Laa Ilaaha Illallah*'. Another hadith teaches us to instruct our children with salaah from the age of seven, and to beat them for salah from the age of ten. (Abu Dawood) It is also reported that Rasoolullah (sallallahu alayhi wasallam) said: ***“Any person who grows up seeking knowledge and worshipping Allah and remains in that field till a big age, Allah shall record for that person the reward of 40 siddeeqeen (Truthful Servants)”*** (Narrated by Ibn Abdul Barr in *Jaami'u Bayaan Al-Ilm* – Darul-Uloom Deoband Journal)

Hazrat Abdullah bin Abbas (radhiyallahu anhu) used to say: ***“Three factors are of extreme importance to the harmonious subsistence of the human race: 1) A Ruler, so that people do not oppress each other and destroy law and order; 2) Trading in copies of the Quran Shareef, so that the recitation of the Quran remains widespread among Muslims; 3) Tutors who will teach our children, even if they have to be paid for this; otherwise Muslims will remain ignorant of their Deen.”*** (Darul-Uloom Journal, August 1999 citing *Tarbiyatul-Aulaad fil-Islam*)

THE MAKTAB SYSTEM DURING THE PROPHETIC ERA

In the era of Our Nabi there was no special or separate madresa for children. Children gained their Islamic education mainly from their fathers who learnt directly from Rasoolullah (sallallahu alayhi wasallam), or by sitting in the majlis of Our Nabi. The youth in that time also gained their Islamic knowledge through these two methods.

However, some narrations do indicate that Rasoolullah (sallallahu alayhi wasallam) had appointed *Mu'allims* or teachers to provide basic Quranic learning to children. For example, Allama Ibn Hajar mentions in his book *Al-Isaaba* a narration, albeit weak and unsound,

that there was a Muallim by the name of Mirdaas in the time of Rasoolullah (sallallahu alayhi wasallam) who was appointed to teach children.

In the Fiqh book *Jaami Ahkaamus-Sighaar* of Shaikh Mahmood bin Husayn Al-Istaroshni it is mentioned that this Muallim was instructed by Rasoolullah (sallallahu alayhi wasallam) not to beat a child more than thrice at one time when teaching. Allama Suyooti also mentioned this narration with a weak chain, citing the book *Al-Kaamil* of Ibn Adee.

Abdullah bin Umar (radhiyallahu anhu) says that Abubakr (Radhiyallahu anhu) used to teach them the tashahhud (*at-tahiyyaatu lillahi, etc*) like one teaches children in a *maktab*. (*At-Talkheesul-Habeer* of Allama Ibn Hajar). In this narration the actual word ‘maktab’ is used, thus suggesting that this system of teaching was in vogue in the time of the Sahaaba. The famous Scholar Ikramah, narrates that Abdullah bin Abbas (radhiyallahu anhu) said: “We used to take the children from the Maktab and offer Taraweeh salaah with them during Ramadaan. Thereafter, we would serve them with sweetmeats and food.” (*Zhakheeratul-Huffaz* of Shaikh Al-Maqdisi)

Imam *Mak-hool bin Abu Muslim*, a famous Scholar of the second century Hijri, who narrated ahadeeth from the Sahaaba, used to say: “*When the (maktab) teacher is not fair and just with his pupils then on the Day of Judgment he shall be considered among the oppressors*”. (Abu Dawood)

Thaabit bin Ajlaan Ansaari (radhiyallahu anhu) says: **“It used to be said that (sometimes) Allah Ta’ala intends to punish the people of a certain area, but when He hears the children being taught the Quran, He diverts that punishment.”** (Daarimi) A statement of this nature from a Sahaabi is tantamount to a direct narration from Rasoolullah (sallallahu alayhi wasallam).

Abud-Dardaa (Radhiyallahu anhu) narrates that once we were in the company of Rasoolullah (sallallahu alayhi wasallam) when he raised his head and looked towards the heavens. He then remarked: **“The time has come for knowledge to be uplifted from people, until they will have absolutely no control over it”** Ziyaad bin Labeed Ansaari (radhiyallahu anhu) asked: “How will knowledge be uplifted when we read the Quran; and, by Allah, we will continue reading it and teaching it to our women and children?” Rasoolullah (sallallahu alayhi wasallam) replied: **“Ziyaad! May your mother lose you! I always thought you were among the Learned Scholars of Madinah! (But here you fail to understand a simple thing!) Look at these Jews and Christians who have the Torah and the Gospel; of what benefit are these books to them (when they fail to practice on these books)?”**

Among other factors, this hadith points out that the Sahaaba were in the habit of teaching the Quran to their children. Just as this hadith gives a direct reference to fathers educating their wives and children in Islamic matters, it also indirectly alludes to the system of teaching Quran to children, which is the basic and most important aspect of the Maktab.

AMAZING ZEAL FOR LEARNING AMONG THE CHILDREN

When the deputation of Thaqeef came to Madinah the youngest member was a child by the name of Uthman bin Abul-Aas (radhiyallahu anhu). His duty was to look after the luggage of the delegation while they were in the presence of Rasoolullah (sallallahu alayhi wasallam). However, he made sure that he was not going to be deprived of Quranic education. When the delegation would return to their lodgings and took rest in the afternoon, he would stealthily slip away and go into the presence of Rasoolullah (sallallahu alayhi wasallam) to learn surahs of the Holy Quran. His tender age and unfamiliarity with the Messenger of Allah was not going to bar him from learning. Such was his zeal for learning that if he found the Messenger of Allah resting, he would go to Abubakr or Ubay bin Ka'ab (radhiyallahu anhum) to continue his Quranic learning. In this manner, he learnt many surahs in a short space of time. By the time he was a budding youth, he knew so much of Quran that Rasoolullah (sallallahu alayhi wasallam) made him the Ameer of Taif, for in spite of his young age he knew the most Quran in his entire community. (*Tabaqaat Ibn Sa'd*).

Imam Bukhari (rahimahullah) brought a special chapter in his Saheeh titled: *The Chapter on Teaching Quran to children*, under which he mentions how Ibn Abbas (radhiyallahu anhu) learnt the Quran while he was still a child.

The above narrations collectively prove that right from the Blessed Era of Our Beloved Rasool (sallallahu alayhi wasallam) a system to teach Quran to children had been set into motion. We also detected from these narrations a name for that system, i.e. *The Maktab*.

THE MAKTAB SYSTEM DURING THE REIGN OF AS-SIDDEEQ ﷺ

In the era of the Sahaaba even elderly people who were unable to read Quran were instructed to attend the Maktab in order to learn the Holy Quran. This happened in the time of Hazrat Abubakr Siddeeq (radhiyallahu anhu) when a man by the name of Saleem bin Aamir was captured by Khalid bin Waleed (radhiyallahu anhu) in Aleppo and brought to The Khalifa in Madinah. Hazrat Abubakr (radhiyallahu anhu) placed this man, who had reverted to Islam, in a Maktab to be taught Quran and other matters of Deen. (*Taareekh-e-Damishq*) This incident also proves that the Maktab system existed even in the time of Islam's First Caliph, Abubakr As-Siddeeq (radhiyallahu anhu).

THE MAKTAB SYSTEM IN THE TIME OF SAYYIDUNA UMAR ﷺ

During his reign as the second Khalifa of Islam, Sayyiduna Umar (radhiyallahu anhu) established the Maktab system on a more formal basis with fixed remunerations. This is considered as one of the many innovative ideas of Sayyiduna Umar (radhiyallahu anhu) in his administration of the Islamic Empire. Initially there were three *Muallimeen* or teachers who would impart basic madresa education to children in Madinah, each of whom was

paid a stipend of fifteen dirhams per month. (*Al-Muhalla of Ibn Hazam vol. 8, p. 195*)). Gradually, as the need increased, more personnel were appointed to teach in the maktab.

Hazrat Umar used to advise that children be taught the Surahs at the end of The Quran Shareef first, for these are easier to learn. (*Musannaf Abdur-Razzaq*) He would only select qualified Ulema and Qaaris to teach in the Maktab.

For this purpose, too, Hazrat Umar ordered that hundreds of copies of the Holy Quran be written and circulated among the Maktab. From Madinah the Maktab system spread throughout the Islamic Empire, especially in foreign lands. Upon the instructions of Hazrat Umar (radhiyallahu anhu) hundreds of Maktab were established along the length and breadth of the Muslim world. In these Maktab the Quran-e-Kareem was taught and read, along with its meanings and interpretations. (Darul-Uloom Deoband Journal)

FAMOUS SCHOLARS WHO LEARNT IN THE MAKTAB

IMAM ABU HANIFA AND THE MAKTAB

Allama Ibn Seereen writes that when Imam Abu Hanifa (rahimahullah) was still a learner in the Maktab he saw in a dream that he was digging up the grave of Rasoolullah (sallallahu alayhi wasallam). His father was perturbed about this dream and told his Maktab Ustaad about it. Abu Hanifa's Ustaad said: "My boy, if your dream is true, then one day you will follow in the footsteps of Rasoolullah (sallallahu alayhi wasallam) and expound his Shariah." Ibni Seereen says that the dream turned out just as the Ustaad had interpreted, and the wonders of Abu Hanifa manifested itself later in life. (The digging of the grave symbolised reviving the teachings of Rasoolullah (sallallahu alahi wasallam))

IMAM MAALIK AND THE MAKTAB

When Imam Maalik bin Anas (rahimahullahu) turned six, his mother enrolled him in a Maktab in Madinah. Since his father had died while he was still an infant, his mother took upon herself the responsibility of admitting him to a Maktab. Imam Maalik remembers that day very fondly. He says that his mother gave him a bath, dressed him up in clean clothing, applied ittar, and wrapped a turban around his head. She then said to him: "My Child, from now on whenever you attend madresa, this is how you dress to show respect to the Word of Allah". Imam Maalik says: "Since then before attending class I always bathed, dressed in clean clothes, applied perfume, and never forgot my turban." Indeed, even when Imam Maalik (ra) began teaching hadith, this was his habit right till the end of his life. (*Sawaanih Imam Maalik*)

IMAM AHMAD BIN HAMBAL AND THE MAKTAB

A narrator by the name of Abu Afeef says that Ahmed bin Hambal (rahimahullahu) used to be with them in the same Maktab. He was still small in comparison to the others, yet they all respected him as a boy of great virtue. He oozed piety and virtue. Once, the Khalifa of the day and some of his most senior advisors and generals travelled to Raqqa, a small town in Iraq, for some administrative work. Whilst living there, these senior officials would correspond with their wives back in Baghdad. The women were unable to write, so they requested the Maktab Ustaad to send Ahmed bin Hambal to write letters back to their husbands. As small as he was, he would enter these homes with his gaze lowered and would write as the women dictated. Such was his modesty even at that stage that he refused to write sentences of intimacy or anything that was undesirable according to him. He would automatically leave out those statements. (*Tarbiyat of Children* by Moulana Mehrbaan Ali (ra))

IMAM MUHAMMAD BIN IDREES AS-SHAAFI'EE AND THE MAKTAB

Imam Shaafi'ee (rahmatullahi alayhi) says: "When I used to attend the Maktab, I would memorise whatever the teacher taught the other children within a short space of time. Since I was an orphan, I could not afford Maktab fees, so in lieu of his teaching, my Mu'allim was happy to let me look after the class in his absence. This was my contribution to the Maktab. The other children would write whatever the Mu'allim dictated to them, but I relied on my memory, and before he had even completed his dictation I would have memorised the entire lesson. A few years after leaving the Maktab Imam Shaafi'ee (ra) joined the company of Imam Maalik bin Anas (ra). (*Qaadhi Iyaadh in Tarteedul-Madaarik*)

IMAM MUHAMMAD BIN ISMAIL AL-BUKHARI

Imam Bukhari (rahimahullahu ta'ala) was inspired with the zeal to memorise hadith while he was still a child in the maktab. His father had died in his infancy so it was his mother who ensured that he attended the Maktab. (*Al-Bidayah wan Nihayah*)

STATEMENTS OF GREAT ULEMA ABOUT THE MAKTAB

It is recorded in *Tabaqaat* of Ibn Sa'd that whenever the great Imam Saeed bin Musayyab passed by a Maktab, he would remark: "*These are the leaders of tomorrow*"

Once the great Muhaddith Sufyan bin Uyaynah, who was the Ustaad of Imam Bukhari (ra), passed by a Maktab and heard the voices of children reciting the Holy Quran. He stood for while in the sun listening to them, and then remarked: "I experience such joy and ecstasy when listening to children reading the Quran"

Another Muhaddith, Ismail bin Rajaa, would gather the children of the Maktab and recite hadith to them. He believed that at that young age they would find it easy to memorize hadith. (From this we realize that it is a laudable practice to teach hadith in the Maktab)

A well-known Wali of Allah, Shaikh Samnoon, once made a statement in a moment of mad love for Allah, saying: *"I find no pleasure in anyone else besides YOU, so test me as You wish!"*. Allah Ta'ala then tested him by causing an unstoppable flow of urine drops. This sickness became so bad that he had to constantly keep a bottle to collect the urine drops wherever he went. He now realized the folly of his rash statement. Life became totally miserable for him, until one night he saw another Wali in his dream and asked him for a solution to his predicament. The Wali instructed him to take the duas of the children in the Maktab. The next day he took his bottle and went to the nearest Maktab. There he addressed the children saying: "Make dua for your uncle, who has become ill due to the rashness of his tongue." They made dua and soon he was cured.

Muhammad Ibnul-Jazri (Rahimahullahu Ta'ala) narrates the incident of a man who was addicted to wine and passed away in that state. His neighbour, who was one of the auliya of that time, saw him in a dream six years after his death. In the dream he saw this alcoholic dressed in the garments of Jannah and in a state of happiness. Upon enquiring as to what was his condition in the akhirat, the alcoholic gave this amazing story. He said: "When I died Allah Ta'ala sent me to Jahannum. For my sin of drinking wine I was lashed with a whip of fire. For every gulp of wine that I had drunk I was beaten a thousand lashes. At the time of my death my wife was pregnant, so soon afterwards she gave birth to a baby boy. When this boy could speak, she taught him to say 'laa ilaahi illallah'. No sooner had he said these words when Allah Ta'ala ordered my release from Jahannum. Upon the age of five she admitted my son into a Maktab. The first thing his teacher taught him was to say *Bismillahir Rahmaanir-Raheem*. Upon the utterance of these words Allah Ta'ala granted me admission into Jannah and blessed me with such favours that no eye had seen and no ear had heard of."

This is just one way of how the Blessings of the Maktab become apparent in the hereafter. There is no doubt that in the Maktab you will find the best people of this Ummat, and I say this on the certification of Our Rasool (sallallahu alayhi wasallam). Did he not say: *"The Best among you is he who learns the Quran and teaches it"*?

This article, therefore, confirms the importance and significance of the Maktab system. In summary, the Maktab system started right from the era of Nabi Muhammad (sallallahu alayhi wasallam) and was supported and promoted by the Sahaaba and the Ulema throughout the corridor of Islamic history. The Maktab was and still is the backbone and basis of all Islamic Learning. All great Ulema and Scholars of past and present have been through this system and gained their early Islamic education from the Maktab. The Ummat, therefore, cannot ever do without the Maktab system. It is thus the duty of the Ummat in every corner of the globe to establish and continue to support this system of

primary madresa learning. The Makaateeb constitute a bulwark against kufr and shirk. Through this system our Deen will continue to prosper, and the Aqaaid of Muslims will be safeguarded.

IMPARTING DEENI EDUCATION IS A NEIGHBOURLY DUTY

The Messenger of Allah (sallallahu alayhi wasallam) emphasized the imparting of Islamic knowledge to people, and warned those who were negligent in this regard of dire consequences. Once he announced: *“What has become of people, they don’t educate, teach, and advise their neighbours. And what has become of others who are not prepared to learn and take advice from their neighbours? I swear by God, they shall have to do this (i.e. learning from and teaching their neighbours) or else I shall soon implement punitive measures against them!”* After hearing this statement, people began asking: *“Who do you think The Messenger was referring to?”* Others replied: *“Probably the Ash’ari tribe, for they are very learned in Islam and they have neighbours who live on farms and in deserts, and are illiterate.”* Thereafter the Ash’ari tribe sought a year’s respite from the Messenger of Allah (sallallahu alayhi wasalam), during which they promised to educate their neighbouring tribes on matters of Shariah. **(Hayaatus Sahaaba, Kanzul-Ummal).**

May Allah grant me, and all who read and practice on the above, acceptance, forgiveness, and maut with iemaan – aameen yaa rabbal-aalameen

The Al-Farooq Newsletter is a periodical published and edited by Mufti Siraj Desai of Madresa Abubakr Siddeeq, Malabar, Port Elizabeth